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EFFECT OF PREPAREDNESS UPON AMERICA'S INFLUENCE AND POWER

BY WILLIAM J. STONE,

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I have been complimented by a request to open the discussion on this interesting subject, "The Effect of a Policy of Naval and Military Preparedness on America's Influence as a World Power."

I shall take two views of the subject: First, our historical policy and its effects. Secondly, a reverse policy and its effects.

It may be safely said that hitherto the United States has not stood before the world as a great war power, but, on the contrary, has stood, essentially and conspicuously, as a great peace power. Our government and people have not devoted themselves assiduously or with great concern to the task of maintaining either a strong military or naval establishment. These interests have held a subordinate place in the thought and activities of our national life. On four notable occasions our government found itself confronted with the necessity of hurriedly and largely augmenting its military strength to meet emergencies. I refer, of course, to the War of 1812 with Great Britain, the War with Mexico, the Civil War between the States, and the War of 1898 with Spain. So far as the military establishment, as contradistinguished from the naval establishment, goes, the government was compelled in each of these four stated emergencies to rely largely, if not chiefly, upon a volunteer force. Judged by the results of these several conflicts, it may be said with confidence that the government did not in any instance rely in vain upon its volunteer army, nor rely in vain upon the other resources necessary to war which the government was obliged hastily to construct and organize. Naturally these results tended to impress the public mind with the belief that the nation might continue to rely upon the patriotism and power of the people who ordinarily follow peaceful pursuits to take care of the country whenever an emergency should arise demanding military service. Moreover, it has been an old traditional American policy that a large permanent military establishment was undesirable.

There have been several reasons for this national attitude. Among these reasons, it has been believed that a large standing army, in the immediate control of men whose lives are devoted to military activities, might, under the dominating command of some abnormally ambitious man or coterie of ambitious men, become dangerous to our ideals of a simple representative democracy; that such an organization would entail grievous and needless burdens on the country; and that it would tend to create a military caste that would in the course of its development incline to bring us more and more into sympathy with the military spirit and policy prevailing in European nations—a spirit and policy generally condemned in this country. Following the admonitions of the elder statesmen who founded and developed our institutions, the mass of our people long ago settled down into the belief that they could safely depend upon the militia and citizen soldiery to grapple with possible dangers coming from the outside to threaten our national welfare. Because of all this, while we have progressed along all other lines with strides almost without parallel, we have remained practically stationary with respect to our regular military establishment, and, until within the last quarter of a century, have done comparatively little to augment our naval establishment. During the last 25 or 30 years we have added materially to our naval armaments, although we still hold a comparatively inferior rank among the greater maritime nations.

I believe this to be, briefly stated, a correct outline of the policy of this nation with respect to its military and naval interests during the course of our national history of more than 130 years. For 130 years we have been, so far as organized military force is concerned, in a state of comparative unpreparedness for war. Distinctly we have been upon a peace basis. What, then, has been the effect of this non-military policy upon our national development and life? I do not say that it is due to this policy, but undoubtedly during this long period our national expansion and development, leading to national prosperity and happiness, have been phenomenal. In addition to our wonderful progress at home, I think it safe to say that the influence of America for good on the outside world has been very great. It will hardly be controverted that the influence of our national example, taken all in all, has been beneficial throughout the world. I have thought proper to say this much about our long-

continued policy of peace in order that we might by way of contrast have this aspect of our national life in mind when we turn to consider the immediate question before this distinguished body, namely, "The Effect of a Policy of Naval and Military Preparedness on America's Influence as a World Power."

That brings me to my second proposition: Shall we reverse the old policy, or materially change it, so as to approach more nearly to a permanent war footing? That question involves both the need for and the effects of a change. There is now a strong movement abroad in the land to change our old policy with respect to naval and military affairs. On the ground that new world conditions have made it necessary, we have started upon a program for a great and rapid enlargement of both our military and naval establishments; and this we are doing in the name of preparedness—especially in the name of what is called preparedness for defense. All of us still proclaim devotion to peace; but it is said that we must be prepared to fight for peace if necessary to make it certain. And there is more in that than one might think at first blush.

I have spoken of the need of a change of policy; but the scope of the exact question before us scarcely requires me to discuss whether this proposed change would be wise or unwise, and the limit on my time forbids such a discussion. Moreover, my principal task is only to provoke discussion. Nor is it necessary for me to discuss the limitations that prudence or patriotism would place upon our preparedness program.

Perhaps it is sufficient to say, that as we move along from one generation to another the conditions and environments of nations change, and in consequence it may follow that what was a wise policy in the past might not be a wise policy for the present or future. I repeat, that from time to time the relations of different nations to each other are changed—changed sometimes from choice and sometimes from necessity. For example, these relations may be changed from choice when two or more nations have in mind to accomplish a certain purpose esteemed to be of mutual advantage; and that purpose may be good or bad, praiseworthy or sinister. But whether it be for a good or a bad purpose, whenever nations combine to accomplish something which other nations regard as inimical to them, the result is a counter-combination. History has furnished us with many instances of combinations made for mutual advantage,

which in turn have led to combinations in opposition; especially is this true with respect to European nations. There may be irritating causes for combinations, relating, for example to territory or to commerce, or it may be to promote a mere ambition to extend the power of one nation or combination to the detriment of another. These irritating causes may be numerous and varied; and they have in the past as often related to small things as to great things. Anyway, as the world grows in population and opulence and the national breathing space becomes more and more contracted, the restless ambition of rulers, and sometimes the grasping impatience of peoples, stirs up a dangerous spirit which pants for dominance and larger opportunity. For causes of this kind and others, which may bear even to us a hideous and threatening aspect, great nations both east and west of us have organized, equipped, and maintain great military and naval establishments. These stupendous organizations have been made ostensibly for defense and for the preservation of peace. O Peace, what crimes are committed in thy name!

But the reasons for these stupendous armaments which we see about us, whatever they are, are of minor importance. The fact is that for half a century the armaments of a large part of the world have been increasing until practically all of Europe and a large part of Asia have become vast military encampments. In the face of this comes the question—Shall we hold steadfastly to our old policy of peace without preparedness? Primarily, of course, the answer to this question must depend first upon our safety at home, and, secondly, upon our influence on the outside world as a power both capable and willing to protect its rights anywhere under the sun.

Whether considered from one of these standpoints or the other, speaking for myself, I think that a large permanent or standing land military force is as undesirable now as ever. I have felt that our military needs would be adequately supplied if we established a number of large training schools and camps throughout the country, where young men could be taught the essentials of military tactics and service. In this way I have believed that we would gradually, and, indeed, rapidly, fill the country with young men educated in the rudiments of military service, and at the same time keep alive the martial spirit of our people, which I deem of high importance. Likewise, I have believed that the government ought to have constantly at its command the means of thoroughly and efficiently

equipping an army of almost any size. Beyond these items of preparedness, I think we could safely rely on a regular army of between 100,000 and 150,000 men, supplemented by the National Guard, and by our millions of patriotic people in civil life. To my thinking there is not one chance in thousands that we will ever be called upon to defend against an invading army of any magnitude, or to send an army of invasion of great size into any foreign land. I cannot believe that any benefit would come to this country from a great standing army that would compensate for the burden of its maintenance. That is all I shall say upon that subject.

My belief is that if ever we are attacked by a foreign power strong enough to make the onslaught perilous, it will come from the sea, not from the land. Hence, I am an ardent advocate, always have been, of the most complete and thorough system of coast defenses. Everything that military and naval science can devise to make our coasts impregnable, I am for. Likewise, and along the same line of thought, I have always been and still am not only an advocate of, but in fact an agitator for, a great navy. I would create a navy strong enough not only to resist assault, but strong enough, if need should arise for it, to take the offensive; strong enough to protect American honor and American interests anywhere in the world.

And now I answer your question, if question it be, by saying that with our seacoasts prepared for defense as I have indicated, and with a navy riding the waves strong enough not only to defend, but to assault if need be, the danger of possible foreign aggression would practically disappear. Add to this such military preparedness as I have outlined, I am confident that we would hold a position which would have the effect of vastly increasing our prestige, influence, and power among the nations of the world.